Special Topics

Overview

Experienced CERT Program Coordinators have identified several areas that require special attention. Paying careful attention to these issues can make your program more inclusive and more successful. Special Topics presents each of these issues, together with tips for working through each as well as resources that you can refer to for more information.

Contents

This step includes the following resources:

- Meeting the Needs of all Participants
- Accommodating Special Needs
- Working With Students
- Reducing Liability
- Organizing CERT Teams
- Organizing CERT Communications
- Tips for Handling Special Issues
- Sample Hold Harmless/Permission Request

Web Resources

- Charity Channel (a website for volunteer managers)
  Web Address: http://charitychannel.com

- Protecting Yourself From Lawsuits
  Web Address: http://home.acadia.net/userpages/waldolva/binfo/lawsuits.htm

- Legal Information Institute, U.S. Code Collection, Limitation on Liability for Volunteers
  Web Address: http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/42/14503.html

- Basic Incident Command Course, IS-195
  Web Address: http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/is195.htm

Special Topics

How To: Meeting the Needs of all Participants

CERT is a valuable program for everyone, and CERT Program Coordinators should encourage everyone to be involved in neighborhood and workplace preparedness.

Meeting Participant Needs

Everyone can benefit from preparedness education and training. Many CERT Program Managers have conducted training to meet the needs of all who want it, believing that there is a place for everyone in CERT. Program managers should attempt to provide reasonable accommodation for those who want to participate.

Recruiting Tips

When recruiting:

- Be honest about CERT requirements. Let people know that you will try to accommodate their needs.
- Don't underestimate the abilities of anyone. Everyone brings some skills to the CERT program. Try to match those skills with jobs performed by CERTs in a disaster.
- Talk to interested persons before class begins. Answer their questions, and identify their needs.

Special Topics

How To: Accommodating Special Needs

Volunteers with special needs are likely to have their own adaptive equipment or other items they need to participate in the CERT program. However, there are some accommodations that you can make to ensure that everyone gets the most from the CERT program.

Accommodating Individuals With Visual Disabilities

Common accommodations for individuals with visual disabilities include:

- Making furniture in the classroom easy to maneuver around, if possible.
- Reserving a seat near the front of the room, allowing room for guide dogs.
- Allowing the individual to orient him/herself to the room before training begins.
- Encouraging the use of a tape recorder for class notes.
- Reinforcing all visual directions with verbal cues.
- Ensuring that lighting is adequate. (Remember, not everyone who is visually impaired is completely blind.)
- Saying aloud material that is written on chart paper or projected.
- Reading through any visually presented material.
- Asking questions to verify comprehension.
- Calling the individual by name when you speak to him or her.
- Identifying yourself when you approach the individual and when you leave.
- Providing a large print version of the course materials, if possible.

Accommodating Individuals With Hearing Disabilities

Some ways by which you can accommodate individuals with hearing disabilities include:

- Allowing the individual to select his or her seat.
- Identifying the speaker, and insist on only one speaker at a time.
- Verifying that you are speaking loudly and clearly enough.
- Repeating questions asked from others.
- Summarizing discussions.
- Positioning yourself so that the hearing-impaired individual can see your face. Remain in one position as much as possible when speaking.
- Writing complex questions on chart paper.
- Ensuring that you do not stand with your back to a light source. The hearing impaired need to be able to see you.

Accommodating Individuals With Speech Disabilities

Accommodations for individuals with speech disabilities include:

- Providing opportunities for the individual to speak, but do not require it.
- Allowing the individual to express him/herself. Do not find words for him/her.
- Maintaining comfortable eye contact while the individual speaks.
- Using your regular speaking voice when addressing the individual. Do not assume that the individual also has a hearing disability.

Special Topics

How To: Accommodating Special Needs (Continued)

Accommodating Individuals With Physical Disabilities

When accommodating individuals with physical disabilities, ask the individual to explain his or her limitations. Then, depending on the individual's needs:

- Verify that the setting is wheelchair accessible.
- Allow the use of a tape recorder or ask another volunteer to provide notes.
- Modify activities as necessary. Remember that all activities are team-oriented, and that buddies and safety officers are always a requirement. These roles may be appropriate for a volunteer with a physical disability.

Special Topics

How To: Working With Students

Students have proven to be a huge asset to some CERT programs. Students have used local CERT programs to fulfill local community service requirements. In other areas, student CERT members have gone on for training as volunteer firefighters and EMTs. But working with students raises some issues that you will need to address before including them in your program.

Developing a Strategy

Before deciding whether to allow students to participate in your CERT program, you should develop a strategy for who can participate and how.

Topic	Points to Consider
Who Can Participate	▪ Students as young as 14 have participated in some CERT programs with parental permission. Other programs allow student participation only if a parent also participates. Consider the needs in your community to determine what age or other restrictions to place on student participation.
How Students Participate	▪ Students who lack maturity may take unnecessary risks during classroom activities, exercises, and activation.
	▪ State laws may prohibit students under a specified age from participating in some types of tasks or from participating during specified hours (e.g., after 10 p.m.).

Recruiting Students

Recruiting students can be easy, especially if you have the cooperation of the local school district. Some suggestions for recruiting students include the following:

▪ If the school district requires community service, work with the district to ensure that students who volunteer for CERTs receive community service credit for their time.

▪ Develop targeted brochures and flyers. Include your name and phone number or email address on all recruiting materials. Coordinate with the local high school to ensure that the brochures and flyers are placed where they will draw the students' attention.

▪ Schedule an introductory session for potential student volunteers and their parents. Require parents to accompany their students to this session. This session will allow parents and students to ask questions about the program and allow you to establish ground rules and expectations for participation.

▪ If possible, allow students and their parents to observe a classroom session or, better yet, an exercise. Observing CERT activities will provide a true "flavor" of what CERTs do and how.

Special Topics

How To: Working With Students (Continued)

Training Students

Students do not require changes in or accommodations to the training to be successful, but may require additional safeguards to ensure their safety. When training student volunteers:

- Establish a climate for safety early in the class. Emphasize the importance of what CERTs do by pointing out that CERTs can make the difference between life and death-but only if CERT members operate safely.

- State the classroom and activity rules clearly and early in the training. Repeat them as necessary, and do not allow deviation from the established safety standard.

- Observe student volunteers closely, especially during the early activities. Make corrections to technique and safety requirements, but do not single students out unless it is absolutely necessary to avoid injury.

- Counsel students who ignore safety rules privately, if possible. Tell them that continued violation of safety rules will cause them to be excluded from the program. Follow through and send students home if they continue to ignore the rules.

Special Topics

How To: Reducing Liability

Some of the most frequently asked questions about CERT programs concern liability and how to manage the liability for the CERT program. Actually, providing training in how to respond safely and effectively in an emergency is a positive way to address liability and prepare CERT members, especially given the alternative of having spontaneous volunteers "show up to help." There are proactive steps you can take to manage liability concerns for your program.

Conducting Research

As a CERT Program Manager, you are also a volunteer manager who needs to become familiar with the regulatory requirements for volunteers in your State. Virtually all States have laws dealing with liability, interviewing, and discrimination in selection, and you will need to conduct some research to ensure that your program is compliant.

Some suggestions for conducting research include:

- **Consult your jurisdiction's legal counsel.** Consulting with legal counsel is probably the fastest way to find answers to most—but not all—of your questions.
- **Conduct Internet research.** There is a vast array of sources available to you on the Internet if you know where to look.
- **Talk with other CERT Program Coordinators** to discuss how they addressed the liability issue.

Special Topics

How To: Reducing Liability (Continued)

Conducting Research: Web Resources

This table includes links to helpful web resources for conducting your research.

Web Resources	Information Provided
Protecting Yourself From Lawsuits http://home.acadia.net/userpages/waldolva/binfo/lawsuits.htm	▪ Background information on theories of liability and how they relate in application ▪ Steps to take to limit liability
Legal Institution Institute http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/42/14503.html	▪ Basic liability protection for volunteers, as established by 42 U.S.C., Chapter 139, Section 14503 ▪ Limitations on punitive damages based on actions of volunteers ▪ Exceptions to limitations on liability
State Liability Laws for Charitable Organizations and Volunteers http://www94311.temp.w1.com/pubs/ssl_01rev.pdf	▪ State liability laws for charitable organizations and volunteers
"Federal Law Protects Non-Profit Volunteers" **Non-Profit Issues, December 1997** http://www.nonprofitissues.com/ready/rr97dec1.html	▪ Liability protections under the Volunteer Protection Act
Thomas Legislative Information on the Internet http://thomas.loc.gov	▪ Information on recently passed (Federal) laws by searching by bill number, bill text, or subject
State and Local Government on the Net http://www.statelocalgov.net/index.cfm	▪ Departments or agency by State, including State volunteer agencies
LawGuru.com http://www.lawguru.com	▪ State and Federal laws and specific subjects, such as disability rights ▪ Answers to questions about specific legal issues (submitted using a web form)

How To: Reducing Liability (Continued)

Reducing Liability During Training: Instructors

Steps that you can take with your instructors to help reduce liability include:

- Establishing training standards and safety requirements for training.
- Briefing all instructors on their responsibilities to conduct safe and effective training.
- Ensuring that all instructors are prepared to meet the objectives for their sessions.
- Providing co-instructors to assist the instructors for all activities.
- Ensuring that all instructors model appropriate safety behavior, such as safety gear for all demonstrations.

Additionally, be sure that your instructors understand that they can give students permission to opt out of an activity if they have a condition that they may aggravate by participating.

Reducing Liability During Training: Students

Steps that you can take with CERT students to help reduce liability include:

- Ensure that students understand that they may opt out of activities if they have a condition that they may aggravate by participating.
- Require all students to sign a hold harmless agreement. (See sample agreement in the resources.)
- Explain the potential hazards that students may face in class activities, during exercises, and during activation.
- Provide copies of all CERT safety rules and requirements to each student. Require them to sign one copy and return it to you before class begins. Encourage the students to keep the other copy for their records.
- Require all students to wear safety gear for all activities.
- When you see an unsafe act, correct it immediately!
- If someone is injured during class, document the injury and ensure that the student receives appropriate medical treatment.
- Emphasize that rescuer safety is the primary concern in training and activation.

Reducing Liability During Training: Classroom/Exercise Areas

Steps that you can take to ensure that the CERT classroom and exercise area are safe include:

- Walk through the classroom and exercise area(s) before each class to identify and correct unsafe conditions.
- Check all to ensure that it is in good working order.

Be sure to make these checks **before every class begins**.

Reducing Liability During Training: Materials

The main step to take to reduce liability related to the CERT materials is to ensure that you have written releases for all copyrighted materials (including photographs and cartoons). (Note that if you are using FEMA's materials without alteration, all necessary copyright releases have been secured.) Remember that photographs and other materials found on the Internet are copyrighted.

Special Topics

How To: Reducing Liability (Continued)

Reducing Liability: During Exercises

Always take the measures below to reduce liability during exercises:

- Conduct a pre-exercise briefing in which you provide the objectives (including safety objectives) for the exercise.
- Treat all drills, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises as the real thing. Enforce all safety rules strictly.
- Stress teamwork, safety equipment, and the use of the buddy system.
- If you see an unsafe act, intervene immediately!
- Conduct a post-exercise debriefing, and cover safety issues as part of the debriefing.
- Stress the need to document everything using the forms approved by the jurisdiction.
- If someone is injured, document the injury, and ensure that the volunteer receives appropriate medical care.

Reducing Liability: During Team Activation

Take the measures below to reduce liability during team activation:

- Educate your departments about the CERT program, the level of training provided, and how to access and use CERT members during an emergency or disaster.
- Require that all team activations are in accordance with established CERT protocols.
- Require team leaders to verify that all CERT members have the necessary tools and equipment, including safety gear, for the response.
- Require a good sizeup and communication of sizeup information to first responders as soon as possible after arrival at the scene.
- Require complete documentation of team assignments, actions taken, results, and communications with first response agency personnel.
- Stress that CERT members should respond in accordance with their training. Being a CERT member does not provide rights or privileges beyond being a CERT volunteer.
- If a CERT member is injured during activation, ensure that the injury is documented and that the volunteer receives appropriate medical treatment.

For these measures to work as intended, you will need to take action **before** activation and reinforce the measures during team exercises.

Special Topics

How To: Organizing CERT Teams

Real incidents are chaotic, and CERT members have little or no experience in dealing with the chaos outside of drills and exercises. To bring order to chaos, CERTs are organized under the principles of the Incident Command System (ICS). CERT members, however, may have difficulty understanding how ICS works. This topic provides tips for making ICS easier for CERT members to understand.

Management Principles and ICS

First responders who use ICS daily understand the advantages of flexible organization and manageable span of control that ICS offers. In an actual event, professional responders use ICS to divide activities into functional groups so that:

- There are clear lines of supervision.
- The person with decisionmaking authority (i.e., the Incident Commander) is not overwhelmed.
- There is a limited span of control for each leader or manager.

ICS Functions

ICS functions are similar to those used in the workplace. Management (the Incident Commander) sets priorities and makes decisions about what is to be done based on the information received from staff functions:

- **Operations** implements the decisions made by the Incident Commander.
- **Planning** receives, filters, and compiles information coming in from the incident scene.
- **Logistics** ensures that the personnel, equipment, and tools required by operations to implement the Incident Commander's decisions are in the right place at the right time in the right quantities.
- **Administration** collects all incident data after it has been compiled, acted on, and/or is no longer needed.

Special Topics

How To: Organizing CERT Teams (Continued)

Applying ICS Principles to CERTs

In simple terms:

- **Management** (the CERT Team Leader) is responsible for deciding what is to be done.
- **Operations** is responsible for how it gets done.
- **Logistics** is responsible for how it gets supported.
- **Planning** is responsible for determining what is going on and how the information gets communicated and/or displayed.
- **Administration** is responsible for how everything gets documented.

The CERT/ICS Command function is shown in the organization chart below.

Caption: The CERT Team Leader is at the top of the organization chart. Below the CERT Team leader on a second level are the Operations Section Chief, the Logistics Section Chief, the Planning Section Chief, and the Administration Section Chief.

Special Topics

How To: Organizing CERT Teams (Continued)

Expanded CERT Organization

To maintain a manageable span of control, each ICS section can be expanded or contracted as necessary. For example, teams assigned to the Operations Section are shown in the organization chart below. Note that each type of team has a Group Leader who reports directly to the Operations Section Chief.

An expanded CERT Operations Section is shown below. Note that, just as the CERT/ICS organization can expand to meet the needs of an unfolding event, it can also contract as the event winds down.
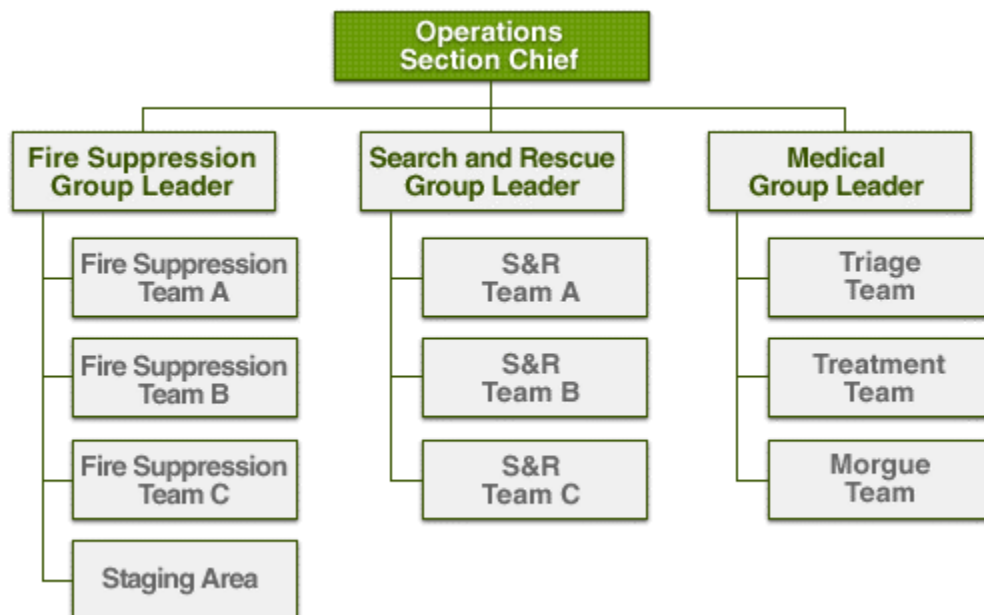
Caption: The Operations Section Chief is at the top of the organization chart. On a second level below the Section Chief are the Fire Suppression Group Leader, the Search and Rescue Group Leader, and the Medical Group Leader. Below the Fire Suppression Group Leader are Fire Suppression Team A, Fire Suppression Team B, Fire Suppression Team C, and the Staging Area. Below the Search and Rescue Group Leader are S&R Team A, S&R Team B, and S&R Team C. Below the Medical Group Leader are the Triage Team, the Treatment Team, and the Morgue Team.

Training and Exercising

ICS and incident management are areas that will require training beyond that provided in the basic CERT materials. If possible, develop an additional module to provide additional information about how to establish an incident command, select incident facilities, and apply the principles of ICS to CERT.

Finally, provide exercises that allow CERTs to apply what they've learned about ICS in a simulated incident. Be sure to conduct a thorough debriefing so that lessons learned are identified and the CERT members' questions are answered.

Special Topics

Organizing CERT Communications

Communication between team members during CERT activation and operations is critical. During alert or mobilization, team members need to communicate rapidly and efficiently. How communications are organized becomes extremely important to CERT operations.

Selecting Communications Methods

There is a range of methods for communicating among CERT members, and each has advantages and disadvantages. In most CERT programs, some combination of the communication methods is used.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Pager	- Can be used to alert/mobilize team quickly - Some offer text messaging for communicating between individuals or the entire team - Unit cost is relatively inexpensive	- Service can be expensive, especially for two-way messaging - Cannot be used for tactical or emergency communications
Land-Line	- Everyone has one - Most useful for mobilization when advance warning of an incident is possible	- Must use a "tree," which can be interrupted if protocols are not followed - Takes time to use - May not be available following some disasters
Cellular Phone	- Ownership becoming more common - Portable	- Initial and continuing costs for individuals - Must use a "tree," which can be interrupted if protocols are not followed - May not be available following some disasters - May be unreliable in some areas - Battery life is short - Not secure
Two-Way Radios	- Portable and inexpensive - Can speak to multiple persons simultaneously	- Not secure; others can listen and/or interrupt CERT communications - Limited range, especially in areas with tall buildings - Relatively short battery life - Should not be used in bomb threat situations

Source: This information was provided by Jim Piper, Aptos-La Selva Fire Department, Aptos, California

Special Topics

Organizing CERT Communications (Continued)

Planning Considerations

When determining how CERTs will communicate, you should first identify who will need to communicate to whom.

Communication methods for team alerts and activation should be discussed with the teams. Some teams may agree to purchase Nextel® cellular phones with two-way communication capabilities if they are available in the area. Other teams may decide that a land-line system will work best. Whatever method is selected for alert and notification, it should be:

- Efficient and organized.
- Available to all CERT members.
- Tested during a functional exercise to ensure that it works.

Communicating During a Response

During a response, CERTs will have a variety of communications requirements. Some of the communications required of all CERTs during emergencies include:

- Intra-team communications, especially during search and rescue operations.
- Inter-team communications required to communicate logistics, request assistance, and provide status.
- Group Leaders to CERT Team Leader.
- CERT Team Leader to first responders (at the Incident Command Post).

Setting Up Communications

As you think about setting up communications, consider two-way radios for:

- Intra-squad and inter-squad communications. Each team should be assigned a different channel or frequency. Section chiefs (Operations, Logistics, Planning, and Administration) should be assigned a separate channel or frequency to communicate with each other and with the Team Leader.
- Communications with first responders. A separate frequency should be assigned to these communications.

Special Topics

Organizing CERT Communications (Continued)

Communicating Via Amateur Radio

If your community has a RACES or ARES organization, you may wish to incorporate a radio operator to communicate between the Team Leader (Command Post) and the Incident Command or Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

Regardless of how you establish CERT communications, be sure to test them thoroughly during exercises.

Visit the below links to access Connection articles on CERT Communications:

- Some Thoughts on CERT Communications
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/6/communications42.html

- Amateur Radio and the Seminole County CERT
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/4/seminole4.html

- Communication Systems Fail - CERT Members Succeed
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/4/washington4.html

Special Topics

Words of Advice: Tips for Handling Special Resources

Patricia Yuen - San Francisco, California
Involving Children in CERT

Children are a wonderful resource to the program in many ways. They bring with them so much enthusiasm. They are a reason for their parents to be more active with the NERT (CERT) Program as we all wait for the "Big One".

Related Links:

- NERT Training for Kids!
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/4/sfkids.html

- San Francisco NERT website
  Web Address: http://www.sfnert.org/index.htm

Laura Baggett - Fremont, California
Removing Obstacles

When you have no obstacles placed in front of you, you soon learn the only obstacles are the ones you create. We did not look at the deaf community, educationally challenged, or our wheelchair bound members as special needs groups. They are citizens of Fremont that need training in disaster preparedness. They are among the best we have. We do not segregate them. They train and drill with the rest of the community. All of our members work well together meet any challenges that arise. We are the true meaning of "TEAM."

Related Link:

- Fremont Fire Department CERT Program and the Hearing Impaired
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/articles/articles2/Freemont.html

Chandra Fox - Edmonds, Washington
Working With Volunteers With Special Needs

We use disabled volunteers on a regular basis and encourage all to participate regardless of any disabilities. The foremost benefit is that the entire curriculum is very empowering for disabled volunteers. When a disabled person comes in expecting to be pushed aside, we treat him or her with the respect of any of our volunteers. We expect the disabled volunteers to participate and that really makes them feel valued that they do have something to contribute. We stress that even with disabilities all volunteers have strengths and skills that are useful to the effort. We really emphasize that no matter what limitations they have, in a disaster situation there is always going to be something they can do to help. Sometimes they may not have the physical capability to perform tasks, but they may have the required knowledge and background.

Special Topics

Words of Advice: Tips for Handling Special Resources (Continued)

Jim Piper - Aptos, California
Establishing Communication Systems

The importance of communications between team members during CERT activation and operations cannot be overstated. During either an alert or a mobilization, team members need to rapidly get in touch and stay in touch with each other.

Considerations for team communications should consider the following:

- Intra-squad communications, especially during search-and-rescue operations.
- Inter-squad communications (e.g., to coordinate logistics, assistance, etc.).
- Squad Leader to CERT command post.
- CERT command post to civil authority incident command post (e.g., fire department or emergency operations center) and/or to cooperative agencies (e.g., Red Cross).
- Locale of operations: urban, suburban, rural.

Related Links:

- Some Thoughts on CERT Communications
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/6/communications42.html

- Amateur Radio and the Seminole County CERT
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/4/seminole4.html

- Communication Systems Fail - CERT Members Succeed
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/4/washington4.html

Frank Lucier - San Francisco, California
Using the Incident Command System

The Incident Command System (ICS) has proven effective in managing to and responding to emergencies since 1975. CERTs should be using it too. ICS puts the tasks that need to be done to manage and/or respond to a disaster into 5 separate boxes or functions (management, operations, logistics, planning/intelligence, administration). By separating disaster tasks into these functions, we have a span of control (1 leader for every 3 to 5 team members) so that CERTs will not be overwhelmed with what they have to do. The problem is breaking down, what can be a very complex system, into something that is easy for the CERTs to use.

Related Link:

- Transitioning to ICS Positions
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/articles/articles2/ics.html

Special Topics

Words of Advice: Tips for Handling Special Resources (Continued)

Ronald Nelson- Los Atlos, California
Forming School Response Teams

The Los Altos High School community realizes that we may have to rely on our own resources in the event of a disaster or emergency at school. This is very apparent when one looks back at recent natural disasters in our State such as: the Whittier Narrows Earthquake of 1987; the Loma Prieta Earthquake of 1989; and the Northridge Earthquake of 1994. When viewing videos of these disasters, citizens are performing much of the rescue work, as there are not enough emergency service workers to meet the needs. Consequently, Los Altos High School is beginning to form a response team at school, which we call the School & Community Emergency Response Team (SCERT).

Related Link:

▪ First on the Scene with SCERT
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/6/scert42.html

Michelle Hale - Kent, Washington
Partnering With School Personnel

Kent, Washington is vulnerable to a variety of natural and technological hazards. School facilities, personnel and students are not exempt to the effects of these hazards. The Kent School District, Kent Fire & Life Safety and the Emergency Management Office have formed a partnership to train school personnel to prepare for and respond to these hazards.

Related Link:

▪ S.E.R.T. School Emergency Response Training
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/5/sert5.html

Special Topics

Words of Advice: Tips for Handling Special Resources (Continued)

Jacqueline Perry - Seminole County, Florida
Giving Teenagers an Eye-Opening Experience

The students in Winter Springs High School's Environmental Class have successfully completed the CERT training. These adventurous students and teachers were the first graduates of our special Pilot CERT Program provided within the Environmental Vocational Program receiving high school credit for learning how to help themselves and fellow students in their own environment.

After learning proper techniques, the students were amazed with their abilities and newly found skills. They were able to perform tasks they did not believe they could. The teenagers had an eye opening experience as they crawled through a dark closet and science laboratory searching for their fallen peers. They experienced first hand gratification as they rescued their injured classmates and brought them to safety.

Related Link:

▪ Seminole County C.E.R.T. Training at Winter Springs High School
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/articles/articles2/Seminole.html

Harry Small - Boca Raton, Florida
Working With High School Students

We regularly use high school seniors. Schools are now starting to implement a mandatory 125 hour community service project for graduating seniors. We provide this training and students get credit for community service hours. Students are also involved in drills. Ages 13-17 are encouraged to take the training, but are required to do so with a parent or guardian. Using students also generates support with parents and extends participation with others because of the student contacts.

Related Link:

▪ The Boca Raton CERT newsletter
  Web Address: http://www.ci.boca-raton.fl.us/fire/Fire%20Letter/CERT/
           CERT%20Sept%202002.pdf

Special Topics

Words of Advice: Tips for Handling Special Resources (Continued)

Frank Lucier - San Francisco, California
Limiting Liability

For the training, I think it is really not an issue but there are a few simple rules. First is hazard mitigation at the training site. Instructors should get there early and remove or fix any potential hazard that could injure the participants. Can't tell you how many extension cords we have taped down.

Second is span of control. Sometimes our classes get a little big. It would not be unusual to have classes of 60 or more people once or twice a year. One train-the-trainer we did had over 100 people. For the lecture portion it really doesn't matter how many people you have. But for the small group and especially the practical/skills and disaster simulation section (where you have the potential for injury) you have to maintain the span of control of about 1 instructor or safety person for every 7 or less participants. We trained over 8,000 people while I was with the Department and we never had a single injury in a training, drill or exercise.

The other part of liability is when CERTs are operating in a real disaster. We have to remember that we are really teaching them life skills with the exception of maybe search patterns and building damage. The rest of the skills they can use day-to-day in their normal lives. As long as they operate within the scope of the training, liability should not be an issue.

Related Link:

- Training, Drills & Liability
  Web Address: http://www.naem.com/connection/4/avert4.html

Special Topics

Sample Hold Harmless/Permission Request

Hold harmless/permission requests can reduce your CERT program's liability. Many CERT programs have all students sign this type of agreement before starting training. A model agreement is shown below.

[COMMUNITY NAME]
COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM PROGRAM
HOLD HARMLESS/PERMISSION REQUEST

I, _____, hereby request permission to participate in the _____ Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. I understand that this training will involve active physical participation, which includes a potential risk of personal injury and/or personal property damage. I make this request with full knowledge of the possibility of personal injury and/or personal property damage. Further, I have read and understand the program outline that describes all class sections and the associated activities.

I agree to hold The American Red Cross, the _____, _____ Fire Department, [COMMUNITY NAME] and [COMMUNITY NAME] Emergency Management, and their agents and personnel, harmless from any and all claims, actions, suits, and/or injury that I may suffer and which may arise as a result of my participation in the above mentioned class.

I agree to follow the rules established by the instructors, and to exercise reasonable care while participating in the CERT program. I understand that if I fail to follow the instructor's rules and regulations or if I fail to exercise reasonable care, I can be administratively removed from the program.

By executing this release I certify that I have read this release in its entirety, understand all of its terms and have had any questions regarding the release or its effect satisfactory answered. I sign this release freely and voluntarily.

_____   _____
Signature   *Date*

_____   _____
Emergency Contact Name   *Emergency Contact Number*

Comments:

_____   _____
Signature of Instructor   *Date*